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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 002738

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI LEADERSHIP STILL SILENT ABOUT ALLEGED IAF
OPERATION IN SYRIA; JOURNALISTS EXPECT "NEW YORK TIMES" TO
PUBLISH DETAILS ON SEPTEMBER 12

REF: TEL AVIV 2714

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno, Reason 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Much to the consternation of the Israeli media and punditocracy, the Israeli civilian and military leadership are continuing to maintain strict silence about the mysterious Israeli Air Force operation deep into Syrian territory early in the morning of September 6. Israeli media reports on this subject are being subjected to military censorship, but have been reporting freely on Syrian and other Arab commentary, including Syrian Foreign Minister Muallem's September 10 press conference in Ankara in which he charged that Israeli aircraft launched rockets at unspecified targets in eastern Syria, but without causing any damage to persons or property. The Israeli press has published several maps, apparently based on Syrian media, showing the flight path allegedly used by the Israeli jets from the eastern Mediterranean, across northern Syria near the Turkish border, to the eastern town of Deir El-Zowr and back. No official Israeli source has confirmed or denied these reports.

¶2. (C) At a reception at the Ambassador's residence on September 10, several prominent Israeli journalists speculated about the alleged operation. One journalist told DCM that she had heard that the target was Syrian "chemical weapons or nuclear facilities," but she did not comment on the source of her information. These journalists told us that they expect the September 12 edition of The New York Times to publish details of the Israeli operation, but the Times Israel correspondent, Steve Erlanger, dismissed this as wishful thinking on the part of the Israeli press in a September 11 conversation with PD.

¶3. (C) The weekend Israeli media widely reported Syrian Vice President Al-Sharaa's statement that Syria will respond at a time and place of its choosing. The IDF held military exercises on the Golan Heights September 10, and DAO reports that the IDF, especially the IAF including air defense assets, is on a high state of alert as Israel enters the Jewish Holy Holidays season beginning at sundown September 12, but there are no indications of preparations for preemptive operations against Syria. Most Israeli observers continue to state that they do not anticipate Syria to go to war over this incident, although many also speculate that Syria could use its wide array of terrorist assets to retaliate against Israeli targets around the world. While no credible details of the operation have leaked yet, one well-connected Israeli contact described the operation to us as a form of "brinkmanship" by Defense Minister Barak that he thought was unlikely to be repeated soon.

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JONES